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## LESSON LEARNED

### Wildfire Response: Issuing Identification to Volunteer and Private Firefighting Units

#### SUMMARY

The Victoria Police, the Country Fire Authority (CFA), and the Department of Sustainability and Environment of Victoria, Australia, established a process to provide volunteer and private firefighting units with identification that would allow them to pass through roadblocks established during wildfires. Providing the units with identification ensures that roadblocks do not restrict the ability of personnel to respond to incidents.

#### DESCRIPTION

In early February 2009, Victoria, Australia, experienced severe and prolonged heat waves, which led to extremely dry forests and grasslands. On February 7, 2009, the most deadly bushfires in the state's history began. Record-high temperatures were accompanied by storm-force winds that strengthened throughout the day. The winds eventually shifted direction across the state, causing the fires to burn more intensely. The bushfires rank as one of Australia's worst natural disasters. In total, 173 people died, far exceeding the loss of life from previous bushfires. The cost of the fires was estimated to be nearly \$4 billion (U.S. dollars).

Victoria is located in southeastern Australia and consists of more than 91,000 square miles. It has a population of more than 5.5 million residents, making it the second most populous state in Australia. Victoria is home to the city of Melbourne.

Immediately after the fires began, police and incident commanders established more than 4,500 roadblocks to regulate traffic on roads leading into and around areas affected by the fires. The roadblocks also restricted access to areas where either a death had occurred or an investigation into the cause of a fire was underway. Emergency management personnel and police officers managing the roadblocks operated under strict and inflexible guidelines as to who would be allowed to pass through roadblocks.

On several occasions, roadblocks challenged the ability of the CFA volunteer firefighters to respond to the fires. The strict access guidelines delayed or prevented the CFA and private firefighting units from reaching the fires. In addition, according to the after-action report, some responders believed that the use of road closures was often excessive and counterproductive. Most of the CFA volunteer units confronted by roadblocks relied on their knowledge of the area to circumvent the roadblocks. Two areas successfully utilized a system of wristband identification for residents and providers of essential services that allowed them to pass through roadblocks.

The [Country Fire Authority \(CFA\)](http://www.cfa.vic.gov.au) is a volunteer-based emergency organization that provides risk reduction, fire suppression, and incident management services to Victoria, Australia.

The after-action report recommended that the CFA provide all volunteers with an identification card to facilitate their passage through roadblocks. The Victoria Police, the CFA, and the Department of Sustainability and Environment formalized this recommendation by establishing *Guidelines for the Operation of Traffic Management Points during Wildfires*. These guidelines call for a system of wristbands to identify people who can pass through a roadblock.

For additional information about the 2009 Victorian Bushfires, please see the [2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission: Final Report Summary](#). The [entire report](#) is available at the [2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Web site](#).

### CITATION

2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. "2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission: Final Report Summary." 31 July 2010.

<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=45479>.

2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission. "2009 Victorian Bushfires Royal Commission Final Report." 31 July 2010.

<http://www.royalcommission.vic.gov.au/Commission-Reports/Final-Report>.

Country Fire Authority, Department of Sustainability and Environment, and Victoria Police. "Guidelines for the Operation of Traffic Management Points During Wildfires." 01 Oct 2009.

<https://www.llis.dhs.gov/docdetails/details.do?contentID=47909>.

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